

STRATEGIES FOR AGGRESSIVE DRIVER ENFORCEMENT



PB99-104150

the following definition
of aggressive driving...

*"...the operation of a
motor vehicle in a manner
which endangers or is
likely to endanger persons
or property."*

REPRODUCED BY: **NTIS**
U.S. Department of Commerce
National Technical Information Service
Springfield, Virginia 22161

Acknowledgments

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration expresses its appreciation to the following law enforcement agencies and organizations whose contributions made the development of this guide possible:

Arizona Department of Public Safety:

Director Joe Albo

Sergeant Robert L. Hohn

Albuquerque Police Department, New Mexico

Arizona Governor's Office of Community and Highway Safety

Arlington Police Department, Texas

California Office of Traffic Safety

Colorado State Patrol

Connecticut State Police

Delaware State Police

Division of Criminal Justice Services, New York

Douglas County Sheriff, Colorado

Fairfax County Police Department, Virginia

Florida Highway Patrol

Fort Worth Police Department, Texas

Greer Police Department, South Carolina

Illinois State Police

Indiana State Police

Maryland State Police

Massachusetts State Police

Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning

Missouri Highway Patrol

New Jersey State Police

New York State Police

Ohio State Highway Patrol

Ontario Provincial Police, Ontario, Canada

Peel Regional Police Department, Ontario, Canada

Pennsylvania State Police

Phoenix Police Department, Arizona

St. Petersburg Police Department, Florida

Rhode Island State Police

Utah Highway Patrol

Utah Highway Safety Office

Virginia State Police

Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles

Washington Metropolitan Police Department, District of Columbia

Washington State Patrol

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration also expresses appreciation to the highway safety agencies whose contributions were invaluable and to the Institute of Police Technology and Management, University of North Florida.

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Preface

A new traffic safety phenomenon, commonly known as aggressive driving, has emerged as an “issue of the 90’s” and is a major concern for the motoring public and law enforcement. For purposes of this document, the following definition of aggressive driving will be used: **“The operation of a motor vehicle in a manner which endangers or is likely to endanger persons or property.”**

As the number of drivers increases, so does the number of vehicles on the road. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the amount of available roadway has not kept pace with the increases in the number of drivers and vehicles. Roadway congestion is considered one factor which tends to exacerbate aggressive driving behaviors. This congestion also places an increased burden on law enforcement officers attempting to enforce traffic laws.

Professionals from various disciplines have begun working to find the answer to this increasing problem. Some psychologists and psychiatrists are approaching the issue from an emotional perspective, studying anger control and stress reduction techniques. A number of law enforcement agencies across the country have launched a variety of operations to target enforcement of the traffic laws commonly associated with aggressive driving, such as speeding, following too closely, unsafe lane changes, and failure to obey traffic control devices. In conjunction with the enforcement, they are conducting media campaigns to increase awareness and educate the motoring public about aggressive driving and basic traffic laws.

A recent nationwide survey released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) regarding speeding and other unsafe driving reveals the majority of drivers in the United States consider speeding and other forms of unsafe driving to be a



major threat to the personal safety of themselves and their families. More than 61 percent of those surveyed say that speeding by other people is a major threat to their personal safety and that of their families. Sixty-six percent of the drivers surveyed say that unsafe actions (other than speeding) by other drivers are a major threat to themselves and their families. The majority of drivers surveyed (52 percent) believe it is very important that something be done to reduce speeding. Even more dramatically, 75 percent of drivers surveyed feel it is important to do something about other forms of unsafe driving.⁽¹⁾

Approximately 6,800,000 crashes occur in the United States each year.⁽²⁾ It is unknown exactly how many of those crashes are caused by aggressive driving. Estimates indicate the number to be substantial, based on the violations committed by the drivers of vehicles involved in crashes and reported by law enforcement agencies as the contributing factor of the crash. By focusing enforcement efforts and media attention on violations commonly associated with aggressive driving and encouraging voluntary compliance with traffic laws in general, the number of crashes and injuries each year can be reduced. Increased use of automated enforcement technology such as red light running cameras and photo speed measuring devices, can have a significant impact as well. This is particularly true in areas where congestion, lack of shoulders or other barriers inhibit law enforcement from making a traffic stop.

Introduction

More traffic on America's roads than ever before is creating considerable congestion in urban population centers. States are working to build new roads to relieve the congestion, but land and money are major hurdles. Land acquisition and construction costs are skyrocketing.

Recently a traffic safety behavior known as aggressive driving has attracted significant media attention. The practice of driving aggressively is not new, but it now seems more widespread and even acceptable in our fast paced society of today. It has gained considerable media attention nationally when several aggressive driving incidents went beyond traffic violations and erupted into criminal acts. Some people have been assaulted either with a motor vehicle or other weapon, and still others have died. For purposes of this document, the following definition of aggressive driving will be used: "The operation of a motor vehicle in a manner which endangers or is likely to endanger persons or property." This document will concentrate on traffic violations and not criminal behaviors.

Aggressive drivers create an unsafe driving environment through their inconsiderate, self-centered driving habits. Drivers often commit multiple violations, including: driving over the posted speed limit, following too closely, erratic or unsafe lane changes, improperly signaling lane changes, and failure to obey traffic control devices. Because of these driving behaviors, hundreds of deaths and thousands of

injuries occur each year, and contribute to the growing problems of hazardous traffic conditions and those criminal acts related to aggressive driving. To adequately address these unique issues, a concentrated and dedicated enforcement campaign is needed, and it must be coordinated with an intensive public awareness campaign.

Media opinion polls taken around the country suggest the perception that aggressive drivers are more of a threat than drunk drivers. Increased congestion on the roadways, especially in urban locations, is frequently the spark that ignites aggressive driving. When some drivers are stuck in traffic, they act out their frustration on the roadway. They may change lanes aggressively, run red lights or stop signs, tailgate, or speed. The public may perceive that aggressive drivers are more of a threat than impaired drivers because they witness acts of aggressive driving on a daily basis, while they may encounter an impaired driver only occasionally.

Because of the danger caused by the aggressive driver, it has become necessary for law enforcement agencies to develop new, aggressive, enforcement methods. And yet, with the ever increasing demands placed on law enforcement agencies, law enforcement executives are being asked to do more with less. Increased calls for service reduce the time that officers are available for proactive traffic enforcement. Agencies need to become more creative in their employment of law enforcement techniques.

Identifying the Problem

When the automobile first arrived on the scene as transportation, roads were not much more than trails and the cars were much less powerful. Only a few people could afford the luxury of owning a vehicle. That quickly changed over the years. Now we have roadways, many designed for high speeds, and vehicles that can easily travel well beyond the posted speed limits. From 1969 to 1995 the population increased by 23 percent. During the same period, the number of drivers increased by 72 percent. The most striking change is a 143 percent increase in household vehicles since 1969. We went from a society of one car per household in 1969 to a society with close to two cars per household in 1995. The construction of new roadways or improvement of existing roadways has not kept pace with the increase in the number of vehicles and drivers. In addition, the number of women in the workforce has increased by 59 percent between 1969 and 1995, while the number of males increased by 2 percent during the same period.⁽³⁾ As a result, massive congestion occurs in metropolitan areas during peak travel times. Congestion is also spreading into rural areas in some locations as commuting times increase and population centers expand.

Society is moving at a faster pace now than in the past. Many people are always in a hurry and do not feel like they have time to slow down and relax. This may be due to the self-imposed desire to maintain a competitive edge over their perceived competition or because of competing demands on people's daily schedules. Whatever the reasons may be, this attitude can place those who share the roadway in jeopardy. The design and structure of our neighborhoods require us, typically, to use a vehicle for our daily transportation needs. It is becoming more difficult, if not totally impossible, in most areas of the country, for people to walk to the local grocery store or a job.

Without a means of transportation today, it is very difficult to function on a daily basis. When we couple this with society's becoming accustomed to instantaneous communications, the problem becomes more pronounced. We are constantly under ever-increasing time and work pressures. In this environment, weekday driving may be seen as one of the last blocks of perceived 'wasted' time. Some people continue working while behind the wheel, using cellular phones and dictating machines. This presents serious problems on the roadway due to the driver being distracted from the full time job of driving. It is possible the increased value of time is causing us to be much more aggressive on the road than ever before, especially during commuting hours. Some drivers see the traffic ahead of them as an obstacle to overcome at any cost.

Where there is a concentration of vehicles in a given area, the incidence of crashes increases. With the increase in the number of crashes, the possibility of injuries and fatalities also increases. Motor vehicle crashes and the resulting injuries are very expensive and must be paid for by someone. The cost is ultimately paid through a variety of sources, such as Federal and State governments, businesses and individuals in increased insurance premiums.

Aggressive drivers often commit multiple violations as they try to make up time or get ahead of others on the road. This places other drivers on the roadway in jeopardy. In their aggressive state of mind, aggressive drivers may not be thinking about the human beings who occupy the other vehicles around them. Of course, the drivers in the other vehicles could possibly be their friends, neighbors, co-workers, or family members. It is time that aggressive drivers start putting a face on the drivers in the vehicles next to them, and realize they are not alone on the roadway. The ones they hurt may be themselves or loved ones.

Program Goals and Objectives

A primary goal of any enforcement program should be the reduction of crashes, injuries and deaths within a community. The objectives of well-planned aggressive driver programs are to identify, design, and use strategies that increase voluntary compliance with traffic laws. This will, in turn, reduce crashes and achieve the goal of preventing injuries and saving lives. Individual agencies can conduct aggressive driver programs, or they may use a multi-agency approach. Programs such as impaired driving patrols are good examples of using a multi-agency approach to pool resources and expertise to achieve a desired goal. A well coordinated, multi-agency effort sends a strong message to the motoring public. Aggressive driving enforcement programs contribute to a safer environment throughout each community and send a message that aggressive drivers will not be tolerated.

As of this writing, no state has legislation making aggressive driving a traffic violation, although this is expected to change soon. Without a legally defined violation, law enforcement agencies must adopt a departmental definition outlining what action(s) will constitute aggressive driving. Managers must decide how aggressive driving information will be captured, e.g., a notation on the citation which reflects that a specific violation was an act of aggressive driving. This is particularly important so the agency will have information about the size of the problem and can measure whether their enforcement operations and awareness efforts had an impact. News media and community leaders often ask law enforcement administrators about the success of high-profile programs. In addition, these administrators may need to justify the operation to elected officials.



The scheduling of aggressive driver enforcement details is also important. Developing a calendar of events which establishes dates, times and locations of specific activities enables supervisors to allocate personnel and equipment properly. These events can be coordinated details concentrating a specific number of law enforcement officers working a specific area. At other times, individual units may work specific areas in response to citizen complaints or other information received by the agency. Calendars should note other law enforcement activities that have the potential of conflicting with the availability of resources and schedule alternative dates for aggressive driving details. Planning may take anywhere from several days to several months, depending on the size of the program and the involvement of other organizations.

Extensive media involvement is critical during aggressive driver details. This is an excellent opportunity to inform the motoring public of the hazards of driving aggressively. Partnerships with the media promote trust, understanding, and cooperation often resulting in better coverage of the enforcement operation.

Suggestions for an Aggressive Driver Enforcement Program

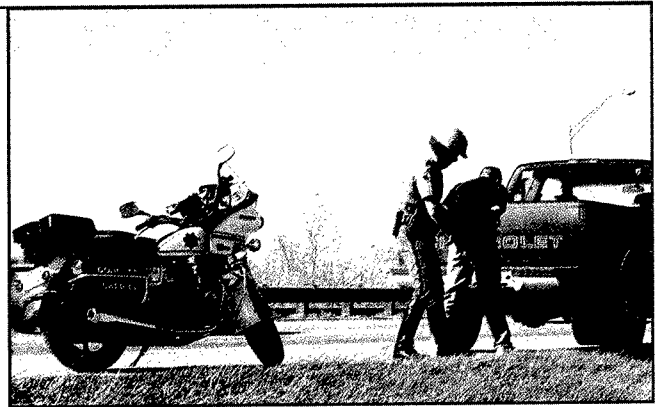
A variety of enforcement techniques are available for use in an effective aggressive driver program. The techniques employed may vary, depending on State law, department policies and public opinion. These suggestions may be adapted for use in any enforcement environment, such as city streets, county roads, or state highways. Creativity is the key to success.

- Select several enforcement zones within the community. Each enforcement zone should be several blocks to a couple of miles in length.
- Enforcement zones may be selected by using crash records and records of hazardous moving violations to identify road segments and intersections that have been sites of crashes caused by violations consistent with aggressive driving. Enforcement zones may also be selected within the community based on citizen complaints. The use of crash statistics and citizen complaints to select enforcement areas lends credibility to the program and acceptance by the public.
- Deploy enforcement units to the selected sites during the hours of greatest crash risk or incidence, but follow a schedule that prevents motorists from predicting with certainty when the special enforcement will be in place.
- Because speed is the most common violation observed with other hazardous moving violations, it would be beneficial for the enforcement units involved in the operation to have the use of radar, lidar, or a time distance speed measuring device. This type of enforcement is often considered newsworthy and will generate public interest and awareness in the program.
- To increase voluntary compliance with traffic laws, the public should be made aware of the aggressive driver enforcement program, although this may be contrary to the past law enforcement philosophy. Publicize the enforcement effort to the maximum extent possible. It is a good idea to announce on morning radio programs where the enforcement activities will be conducted that day, as long as the schedule does not become so regular it becomes predictable. The objective of the program is to gain voluntary compliance of all traffic laws, which will in turn reduce the potential for crashes. Writing citations is not the main objective, but a means to increase public awareness, voluntary compliance, and improve the quality of life in the community. This theme must be incorporated into the program to ensure public acceptance of the special enforcement effort. The public should also be made aware of what they can do to avoid the aggressive driver. Actions by a non-aggressive driver that may spark aggressive behavior should be avoided, e.g., slow speed in the left lanes.
- Use of unmarked, non-traditional vehicles for aggressive driver enforcement in the community will contribute to public awareness by increasing motorist uncertainty about which vehicles are used for enforcement. It will also generate free publicity about the enforcement program. The use of both unmarked cars and motorcycles increase the



effectiveness of any aggressive driving enforcement program. Marked patrol cars create a deterrent effect when present, but this deterrence is lost when they leave the area. When motorists see a marked patrol car, they are usually on their best behavior and stay that way until it is out of sight.

- Increase enforcement by dedicated traffic personnel, but also emphasize aggressive driving enforcement in all routine patrols throughout the community. Aggressive driving enforcement must be a priority to everyone on patrol, not just traffic units, regardless of their assignments. This gives the perception that traffic laws are not viewed as important. If this is allowed to occur, the wrong message is sent to the motoring public. Law enforcement officers should be encouraged to take action, and understand their actions create a safer community for themselves as well as citizens. Both the public and law enforcement officers should also be made aware of traffic stops that result in criminal arrests.
- Devote a substantial number of hours to the enforcement program to maximize the probability of achieving measurable results. It is suggested that at least two enforcement details be conducted in the predesignated locations. The duration of the details can range from three to six hours each, depending on the enforcement location chosen and actual activity. Doubling the effort during the first two months of the program will increase the initial impact of the program and permit a relaxation of effort in subsequent months. Officers and the public alike will normally notice the effects within one month as they observe fewer aggressive driving violations. It is recommended deployment strategies remain flexible, permitting officers to go to another enforcement area, if aggressive driving declines in an assigned location.



- The objective of the deployment strategy should be to maximize the visibility of the law enforcement presence. Deployment of law enforcement officers to a general area to work individually at different times is one way to accomplish this. Another method is a team approach. Visibility can sometimes be accomplished most effectively by detailing several enforcement officers to work together in a designated area rather than assigning each officer to work individually at various locations. Working as a team allows flexibility, such as by permitting officers to use marked patrol vehicles, unmarked cars, motorcycles or other enforcement vehicles. It also allows for the use of unique equipment, such as aircraft, to observe aggressive driving violations that may be undetectable by ground units. Some law enforcement officers prefer the team approach for tactical reasons, and some communities consider a team approach to be a requirement for safety reasons. Whichever approach is ultimately carried out, the objective should be to maximize law enforcement visibility to increase the perception of law enforcement presence within the special enforcement area. It is also important to maintaining acceptable levels of officer safety throughout the detail.
- Encourage law enforcement officers and managers to participate in meetings and activities which

support the aggressive driving enforcement program (for example, providing ride-along opportunities for reporters; demonstrating laser or radar equipment for citizens, reporters, prosecutors, legislators and judges; participate in a speaker's bureau or provide TV and radio interviews, etc.).

- Gain the agency's commitment to a vigorous aggressive driving enforcement program for at least six months. This may be accomplished by briefing law enforcement executives on benefits to the community in terms of crash reduction. This can be expressed in potential lives saved, reduced injuries, dollars saved in property damage and medical costs, and reduced stress while driving.
- Data collection is an important aspect of the aggressive driving program. Establish a method for gathering statistics on aggressive driving violations, but distinguish between aggressive driving infractions and non-aggressive violations (for example, just because drivers are stopped for speeding does not mean they were driving aggressively). Citations should be marked in some manner to identify the true aggressive driving violations. If possible, conduct a traffic study before implementing an aggressive driving program to find out how severe the problem is in a specific area.

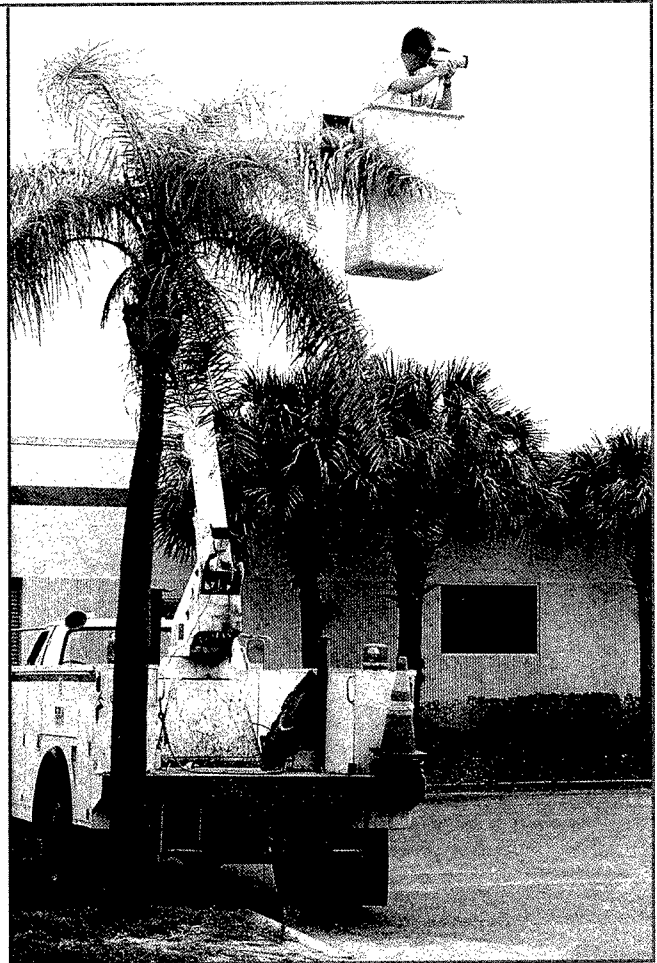
This information establishes a baseline for further studies later about the effectiveness of the program.

- Obtain crash statistics for the special enforcement area and compare the incidence of aggressive driving related crashes during the program to the incidence of crashes during the same months in previous years. Exact numbers of acts of aggressive driving for previous years may be difficult to obtain. By looking at the number and types of violations contributing to the crash, and separating out those considered consistent with aggressive driving, approximate numbers can be obtained.
- Involving the prosecutor's office and the courts in aggressive driving enforcement programs are important. Briefing the prosecutor's office and the courts of the enforcement program ahead of time, allows them to prepare for the additional case load. It also allows prosecutors to provide suggestions or information about specific laws that may strengthen the aggressive driving program, making prosecution easier. If prosecutors or judges feel left out of the information loop, they may not fully support the aggressive driving program, which could be detrimental to the overall effect of the program. A briefing at the beginning of the enforcement program will avoid this problem.

Examples of Aggressive Driver Enforcement Programs

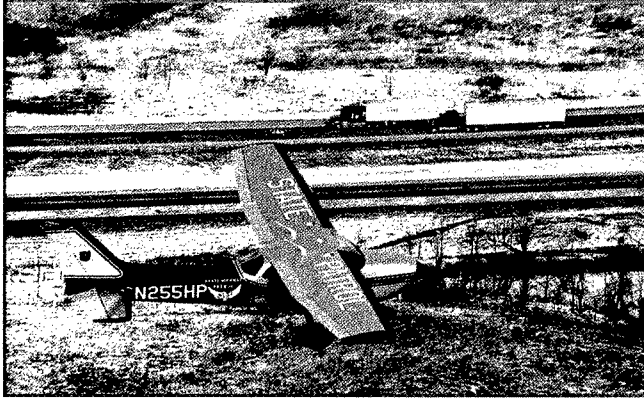
Enforcement programs should remain flexible enough to adapt to last minute changes. Following are examples of enforcement programs that may be used for aggressive driving enforcement. These programs may be modified as needed to accommodate state laws, department policies or public opinion.

- A state, county, and municipal law enforcement agency combine efforts to address the aggressive driving problem in their community. The agencies deploy marked cars, unmarked cars, and motorcycles in a predesignated area. They saturate the area for approximately four hours using a zero tolerance approach to vigorous traffic enforcement. Besides the vigorous traffic enforcement, there is also extensive media coverage. The media coverage begins before the actual enforcement detail and is continued for several days afterward.
- A law enforcement agency uses equipment such as tractors, bucket trucks, and lawn mowers as an observation platform for their officers. Armed with a laser speed measuring device, the officer is positioned to detect not only speeding vehicles but also vehicles running traffic signals or stop signs. This information is radioed to other uniformed officers stationed in the immediate area to make the traffic stops and take the necessary enforcement action. Media coverage before the enforcement activity is important. Television stations may elect to cover the story live at the scene. This continued



media coverage plus the use of non-conventional equipment for enforcement has a continued deterrent effect.

- A state law enforcement agency deploys fixed-wing aircraft or helicopter to work aggressive driving details. The aircraft is used as an observation platform, while marked law enforcement vehicles on the ground stop the



identified violators and take the necessary enforcement action. Ground units represent state, municipal and county law enforcement agencies from the area. One ground law enforcement vehicle

has a television reporter and camera crew riding along to report on the enforcement activity.

- A law enforcement agency uses non-traditional unmarked vehicles, such as vans driven by plain clothes officers, to locate aggressive driving violations. Once violations are observed, the officer radios the information to marked law enforcement vehicles in the area who stop the identified violator and take the necessary enforcement action. News media usually cover the aggressive driving issue for several days before the enforcement detail and a newspaper reporter rides with officer in the unmarked vehicle.

Media Activities

It is crucial law enforcement agencies realize the importance of successful media relations and public information programs. Regardless of the activity conducted, enforcement projects are not as effective alone. When quality public information and education are conducted in concert with enforcement, awareness is heightened, voluntary compliance increases, and the deterrent effects are stronger.

To achieve the ultimate goal of reducing injuries and deaths resulting from aggressive driving, public awareness must be raised concerning enforcement efforts. Despite the number of drivers issued citations or arrested, the only people aware of this activity are usually the one being arrested or receiving the citation. Most of the motoring public, some of whom are violating the law, are usually not aware increased enforcement activities are taking place.

By introducing timely public information supporting the enforcement activities, drivers have a greater "perception of risk." This perception sends messages that a substantial risk exists of being cited, arrested, injured, or killed while driving aggressively. As a result, more drivers are encouraged to voluntarily comply with traffic laws. Voluntary compliance with traffic laws reduces motor vehicle crashes. In addition, the public awareness efforts may also change attitudes and driving behavior.

To maximize the "perception of risk," establishing a unique program identity is important. The program should be outlined to the media, with an explanation of why the program is necessary, what the desired outcome is, and what method is being used to attain the program's goals. To be most effective, publicity about aggressive driver program activities should be provided to all forms of the media including print, radio, and television.

Media should be supplied with a news release that contains accurate information describing aggressive driver activities. Written news releases provide a permanent record of enforcement activities, highlight upcoming events, and eliminate communication errors between media and program participants. News releases should be given to the media three or four working days before aggressive driver details are to take place. It should:

- announce upcoming events,
- provide basic background information (Who, What, Where, When, Why and How),
- deliver official statements on the involvement of enforcement agency (ies), and
- announce news conferences (if applicable).

The news release should include the names of appropriate departmental personnel who will be available to provide further information.

News conferences are an extension of news releases. Agency personnel are present to deliver the message and answer follow up questions. Organized and well-managed news conferences project a positive image of the program and the participants. Attendees at an aggressive driver news conference may include, but need not be limited to:

- government leaders,
- law enforcement administrators from participating agencies,
- law enforcement officers assigned to the detail,
- prosecutors,
- members of the medical community (i.e., doctors, nurses), and
- business leaders and citizen groups, and
- victims of aggressive driving incidents and their friends.

Participants at the news conference should be pre-briefed on the content of the news conference and be prepared to answer questions concerning their involvement. If several agencies are participating, consider holding the news conference at a neutral site, such as at a court house or other public area.

During actual aggressive driving patrols, live remote broadcasts should be encouraged. If permitted, ride-alongs for media representatives may provide additional coverage. The “on the scene” story can add a new dimension with reporters providing first hand information. Reporters participating in “ride-alongs” must have permission from both their news agencies and the law enforcement agency involved, and clearly understand the guidelines associated with the “ride-along,” i.e., do not interfere with the officer’s

interaction with a violator, know what to do if necessary to call for help, etc. Law enforcement officers selected as ride-along representatives for the aggressive driving patrol should be briefed in advance and feel comfortable with being observed by the media and responding to their inquiries. Needless to say, the agency representative should serve as a good role model, e.g., wear a seat belt and insist the reporter do so as well. Select an articulate officer who is a positive representative of an agency.

Managing and coordinating media in live situations is extremely critical. Done properly, this type of coverage may provide several benefits, including:

- the immediate release of relevant information,
- an increased perception of risk and deterrence effects, and
- a strengthening of positive relationships with the media.

Post-activity news releases are valuable tools which help promote a positive relationship with media. At the conclusion of an aggressive driving patrol, involved personnel should forward their reports to an identified program coordinator. The coordinator should tabulate program activities, then send by facsimile or deliver complete results to the various news sources. Post activity news releases should include:

- total number of traffic stops,
- number of citations issued by violation,
- number of arrests for other violations/crimes,
- list of participating agencies,
- number of officers involved, and
- name of person to contact for further information.

By coordinating these various media activities, law enforcement participants generate additional news coverage surrounding their aggressive driving patrols, including:

- pre-activity news releases/conferences,
- live/remote coverage at the time of the activities, and
- post-news releases, the day following the activities.

Follow up stories or “spin offs” can also be generated when enforcement programs enjoy positive media relations. Very often, media representatives decide to pursue interviews on related stories, such as, reduction of serious/fatal crashes, better compliance with traffic laws, or the effect good traffic enforcement can have on apprehending criminals or retrieving stolen vehicles. Spin off stories are an effective means of continually involving media in traffic safety issues.

Local public service announcements (PSAs) broadcast traffic safety messages to the public through various types of media. PSAs are a form of advertising intended to introduce ideas and influence changes in behavior. Public information officers and aggressive driving patrol coordinators should approach PSA development in the same way as normal advertising, considering the use of major themes and target audiences. It is best to include all forms of media as potential sources for delivering the information.

Further, to help law enforcement agencies with media and public relations, NHTSA has developed a manual entitled, *Law Enforcement Public Information, A Guide for Law Enforcement Administrators for Successful Media Relations, Effective Strategies and Unit Implementation*. The content of this publication can be modified easily to fill any law enforcement agency's particular public information need. It is a valuable desk reference.

Summary

Strategies presented in this manual are provided to assist law enforcement agencies in coordinating aggressive driving activities. Any strategy may be adopted or modified to meet the needs of individual agencies. Ultimately, it is through initiatives such as aggressive driving programs that result in reduced traffic-related injuries and deaths. Law enforcement officials are encouraged to consult the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) web site, www.nhtsa.dot.gov for more resources or to

contact NHTSA at the following address to learn more about aggressive driving enforcement strategies:

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Traffic Law Enforcement Division, NTS-13
400 7th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590
Phone: (202) 366-4295
Fax: (202) 366-7721

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Appendix A

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